

VZCZCXRO0929
OO RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL
DE RUEHTH #1651/01 3241527
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 201527Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1111
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 ATHENS 001651

SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/20
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [GR](#) [TU](#) [MK](#) [ZL](#) [AF](#) [RS](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: ASD VERSHBOW'S GREEK BILATS: AEGEAN/TURKEY, NATO, ISAF,
BALKANS, IRAN, MD

REF: ATHENS 1649

ATHENS 00001651 001.2 OF 005

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In separate meetings November 16 with the Prime Minister's Diplomatic Advisor Dimitris Paraskevopoulos and MFA Secretary General Ioannis-Alexis Zepos following his participation in the High Level Consultative Committee (reftel), Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Vershbow explored possible routes for progress on Aegean sea issues; discussed Greece's bilateral relations with Turkey; briefed interlocutors on U.S. missile defense plans; urged the Greeks not to re-up the "erga omnes" ante in Macedonia negotiations; exchanged views on NATO Reform, Strategic Concept, and NATO-Russia; urged the Greeks to do more in Afghanistan; and responded to their questions about Iran. MFA officials took a hardline, legalistic approach on Aegean issues, while the PM's advisor gave a thoughtful overview of the Turkey relationship, and lamented that Turkish actions complicated Greece's longstanding desire to support Turkey's EU bid. On Macedonia, both interlocutors stressed Greece's support for Macedonia's Euroatlantic aspirations, but noted Greece could not support EU accession talks without resolution on the name issue. They appreciated the missile defense brief, and focused on Russia's views and the Iranian threat. With regard to the recent decision not to deploy a Greek engineering unit out of Kabul to RC-West, both stressed budgetary challenges, and stated that the bulk of Greek forces must remain at home to defend against Turkey. The PM's diplomatic advisor stressed that PM Papandreou desires a strong, dynamic bilateral relationship with the U.S., and wants to find ways to put substance behind the rhetoric. END SUMMARY.

Aegean Sea and Turkey

12. (C) ASD Vershbow told both Ambassador Dimitrios

Paraskevopoulos, the PM's Diplomatic Advisor and MFA Secretary General Ioannis-Alexis Zepos that he and Alternate MOD Beglitis had informally discussed earlier in the day the idea of establishing airspace navigation "rules of the road" for the whole of NATO -- rather than just for the Aegean -- as an indirect way to defuse Aegean tensions. He reiterated that the U.S. was concerned with Turkish overflights of inhabited Greek islands in the Aegean, but that both sides needed to work to reduce tensions. ASD Vershbow commended PM Papandreou's trip to Istanbul shortly after taking office, and stated that with the PM's openness, plus public Turkish policy objectives of zero problems with Turkey's neighbors, an opportunity existed for progress. He urged the Greeks to continue their important support of Turkey's EU aspirations.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Paraskevopoulos pointed to progress between Greece and Turkey on issues like business, tourism, and the environment during Papandreou's time as Foreign Minister from 1999 to 2004, and noted that it is "high time" to start approaching the tough, "core issues." He reiterated Greek support for Turkish EU accession, yet looking ahead to the December EU Council meeting, stated that Turkey has not delivered on EU prerequisites. He outlined four key aspects of Greece's relationship with Turkey:

a.) Aegean: Problems with Turkish provocations "over and in" the Aegean continue.

ATHENS 00001651 002.2 OF 005

b.) Cyprus: Greece has not yet seen a meaningful gesture from Ankara on the Cyprus issue, which will complicate Greece's stance at the December EU Council meeting;

c.) Minority rights and the Patriarchate: Greek leaders see many Turkish promises, but no action. While pessimistic, he urged U.S. influence on Turkey for progress by December, and to convince Turkey that progress was in its interest.

d.) Immigration: The 2002 readmission protocol signed by then-FMs Papandreou and Cem "irritated the Turkish establishment," he asserted. He complained about the perceived failure by Turkey to honor its end of the deal, stating that Turkish cooperation is indispensable to solving Greece's illegal immigration crisis.

Paraskevopoulos stressed that Greece could not conduct "business as usual" at the EU in December without some Turkish progress on the above interrelated issues. We want to strengthen relations and solve bilateral problems, he stated, but we need "something" from Turkey by December.

¶4. (C) SecGen Zepos, accompanied by the NATO and IO Director General (A/S-equivalent) Eystathios Lozos, took a hard-line, legalistic approach on Aegean issues. Zepos defended then-NATO SecGen de Hoop Scheffer's decision to proceed with Exercise Noble Archer in summer 2008, in which NATO aircraft overflew the Greek island of Agios Efstratios, an island which Turkey believes is demilitarized according to treaty, and which Greece does not. In any case, Zepos argued, the SYG had decided that high-altitude overflight would not violate demilitarized status, irrespective of the positions of either the Turkish or Greek side. Zepos urged the U.S. and others not to apply principles of neutrality that he characterized as unwittingly validating one side's position, and stated that NATO had the right to fly anywhere in NATO territory. DG Lozos failed to see any utility in a NATO-sponsored "rules of the road," arguing that international treaties had already clearly defined boundaries and sovereignty in the Aegean and that treaties

cannot be ignored for the sake of "expediency." Zepos, looking toward the EU Council meeting in December, complained that Turkish overflights of Greek Aegean islands create a sour mood among the Greek public, and don't appear to be consistent with the actions of a party that seeks progress.

Missile Defense, Iran

¶5. (C) ASD Vershbow told his interlocutors the United States hoped for Greek support over the coming year so that at the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit Allied leaders could embrace missile defense as a NATO mission, and as a key aspect to the Article V collective defense guarantee. He explained that the U.S. Phased Adaptive Approach was more effective, responsive, and better able to evolve than earlier U.S. missile defense plans. He laid out the four phases of implementation, noting that given geography vis-a-vis Iran, the first land-based site for the SM-3 missiles (Phase 2) would need to be located somewhere in southeastern Europe: Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, or Greece. He was clear that this was not a

ATHENS 00001651 003.2 OF 005

request to Greece, and that no decisions had been made. ASD Vershbow noted that Greek Patriot missile systems could conceivably link into an overall future NATO command and control architecture, and expressed willingness to try to facilitate expert-level follow-on consultations should the Greeks wish.

¶6. (S) Both Zepos and Paraskevopoulos appreciated the frank information, but appeared more interested in Russian views and the status of international efforts to thwart the Iranian nuclear effort. ASD Vershbow stated that he had seen some positive signs but some continuing skepticism from the Russians on missile defense, and that the Russians have told us they agreed on our assessments of Iranian capabilities, but still have doubts about Iranian intentions to threaten Europe with ballistic missiles. Vershbow reinforced with the Greeks that Iranian activities such as support for Hezbollah and IED facilitation in Iraq and Afghanistan leave little room for complacency about Iranian intentions. He told Paraskevopoulos that if the Iranians had not changed their position by the next meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors, the question of sanctions would have to be looked at more vigorously. Both noted the French are leading proponents of the efficacy of sanctions against the Iranian leadership, and that Russia's stance in the UN Security Council would be key.

Macedonia

¶7. (C) Paraskevopoulos went to lengths to confirm the PM's support for Macedonia's Euroatlantic integration. He described Greece's significant economic ties to Macedonia, said that in 2005 Greece was among the first EU states to support Macedonia's status as a potential candidate, and noted the PM's direct overtures to Skopje. Yet he was clear: "we cannot agree to (EU) talks without a resolution of the name." He offered that based on Secretary Clinton's recent meeting in Berlin with PM Papandreou, he believed that she "understood the Greek approach." He asked for American help in pushing the Macedonians to negotiate "on a civil basis." Zepos, too, stressed Greek support for Macedonia's integration into

Euroatlantic structures; "it will be full speed ahead," he stated, once the name issue is resolved. Yet he reiterated that Greece needed to see some positive steps from Skopje.

¶8. (C) ASD Vershbow noted U.S. concern that Greece not harden its position on the erga omnes use of a geographically modified name to include insistence on the use of that name within the borders of Macedonia, as Greek negotiator Vassilakis had recently implied in New York. Don't push the Macedonians so far it becomes impossible for them to move, he cautioned. ASD Vershbow noted he would see the Macedonian MOD at a meeting of the Adriatic Charter MODs the next day, and would urge him to work for constructive Macedonian engagement on this issue. Paraskevopoulos reminded ASD Vershbow of the bipartisan agreement between the two main Greek political parties forged during the previous New Democracy administration that significantly and only recently moved the Greek position to one supporting the use of a geographically modified name that contained the word "Macedonia." Characterizing this as an already significant concession to the Macedonians, he noted that anything that went beyond that would stand no chance of Parliamentary approval, even if a government were so foolish as to attempt it.

ATHENS 00001651 004.2 OF 005

Afghanistan

¶9. (C) While noting our disappointment with the recent Greek decision not to deploy its ISAF engineering battalion out of Kabul to RC-West, ASD Vershbow thanked both interlocutors for the additional Greek pledges to the ANA Trust Fund, and the pledge to return Greek medical teams (two teams, 16 pax total) to RC-North. He urged them to stay engaged, and to look for additional opportunities to contribute, noting that Greece's large military should enable a larger military contribution to ISAF than Greece presently maintains. Failure in Afghanistan and an emboldened Taliban would have global repercussions, he underscored.

¶10. (C) Paraskevopoulos and Zepos stated that the bulk of Greek forces must remain at home to defend against Turkey. They also pointed to severe budgetary pressures and low public support for the mission. Paraskevopoulos raised concerns about both the military and political situations in Afghanistan. ASD Vershbow acknowledged that the military situation was challenging, and that at present, our forces were not able to partner as effectively with Afghan police and soldiers as they have managed to do with their Iraqi counterparts. He reinforced the need for a surge in the international training effort, and the need to send a clear message to President Karzai that governance must improve at both local and national levels.

NATO

¶11. (C) ASD Vershbow focused on NATO issues with SecGen Zepos, who in addition to having served as Greek Ambassador to NATO from 2004-2007, is also one of NATO SecGen Rasmussen's "wisepersons" who are working under former Secretary Albright's leadership to assist in the development of the new Strategic Concept that Allies plan to adopt at the Lisbon Summit. Both agreed on the need to create a visionary new document that speaks to Alliance publics, and makes

NATO's case to the generation that came of age following the Cold War. Zepos noted that during his time as Ambassador in Cairo (2007-2009), he discovered that most Egyptians still view NATO as an outdated Cold War relic; a "user friendly" Strategic Concept can help change that, he said. He cautioned that in the current global economic environment, NATO must be careful in balancing its ambition with reality. Those who wish for a more "activist" Strategic Concept must think whether NATO really can do more in the world at present if it is bogged down in Afghanistan. ASD Vershbow commented that a good Strategic Concept will inspire members to produce the resources to match the level of ambition, and will find the right balance between new versus old threats, and between Article V versus expeditionary operations. ASD Vershbow outlined U.S. goals for NATO Reform: more efficient allocation of resources; greater use of common funding; development of "niche" capabilities whereby smaller countries like Greece could bring specific capabilities to missions; collective procurement such as the C-17 airlift consortium; and streamlining NATO civilian and command structures.

ATHENS 00001651 005.2 OF 005

¶12. (C) On Russia, ASD Vershbow and Zepos agreed the NATO-Russia relationship needs work. Zepos expressed the belief based on the interaction with his Polish "wiseman" counterpart that Baltic and central European nations are more sanguine toward Russia now as compared to three years ago. ASD Vershbow doubted that assertion. On the CFE, ASD Vershbow and Zepos agreed on the need to think about options given the ongoing Russian suspension. DG Lozos stated that the Russians had recently asked for Greek support to arrange a temporary Adapted CFE ratification, to which the Greeks had said no. ASD Vershbow concurred that was a non-starter, and posited the need to break the stalemate of the present situation whereby neither the CFE nor the A/CFE are implemented.

Souda Bay

¶13. (C) Reinforcing an issue raised with Alternate MOD Beglitis earlier in the day, ASD Vershbow told SecGen Zepos that it was his understanding that the MFA was the last remaining obstacle to providing the U.S. with written authorization to proceed with the construction of a jet fuel pipeline and fuel storage tanks that would maintain high-capacity refueling capabilities and protect the environment at and around our Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay, Crete. He stated that Alt/MOD Beglitis was optimistic the issue could be resolved by the end of the year. Zepos asked the MFA's North America Office Director, present at the meeting, if the issue could be fixed by year's end, to which she replied affirmatively. ASD Vershbow asked for continuing high-level engagement within the MFA to ensure follow-through.

¶14. (U) This cable has been cleared by ASD Vershbow.
Speckhard